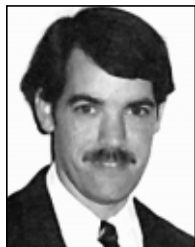


Teacher Retention Study Gets It Exactly Wrong

By Mike Antonucci



Mike Antonucci

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) recently released a study called "No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children," in which it asserted: "The conventional wisdom is that

we lack enough good teachers. But, the conventional wisdom is wrong. **The real school staffing problem is teacher retention.**" (emphasis in original)

While acknowledging true shortages in math, science, and special education, NCTAF says America produces a sufficient supply of teachers each year—enough even to cover the retirements of an aging teacher force. The National Education Association (NEA) immediately issued a press release applauding the findings, even though the union has been touting a national teacher shortage for years, and the NCTAF study refers to the teacher "shortage" in derisive quotes. Instead, the study claims, we should be concerned about the "debilitating" teacher retention problem.

"Teacher retention has become a national crisis," it concludes, painting a picture of teachers driven from the field by lousy pay, poor working conditions, and lack of respect. More than three-quarters of NCTAF's report consists of policy recommendations for increased teacher retention, including plugs for peer review and national certification.

The report uses the often-cited statistic that nearly half of America's public school teachers leave the profession by the five-year point. The data are drawn from Richard M. Ingersoll's study for the *American Education Research Journal*. Using cumulative percentages disguises the trend in teacher "separations" (a term used

by the U.S. Department of Labor to describe people who leave their jobs both voluntarily AND involuntarily):

Separate after first year: 14 percent
 Separate after second year: 10 percent
 Separate after third year: 9 percent
 Separate after fourth year: 7 percent
 Separate after fifth year: 6 percent

Mentioned nowhere in the NCTAF report is the issue of tenure (or due process, if you prefer that term). Most states bestow it at the two- or three-year point, and after it is bestowed, it is extraordinarily rare for a teacher to be separated involuntarily.

But when teachers are still probationary, they can generally be dismissed without cause. In short, the separation percentages in the first three years are relatively inflated compared to subsequent years because that's the only time teachers can be fired.

But whatever arguments one makes over teacher shortages or retention problems, they pale in comparison to a single glaring omission made in the NCTAF study: *context*.

Is teacher retention a national crisis as the report claims? Are these separation percentages simply too high? Losing nearly half of your workforce after five years seems catastrophic, at least until you compare it to every other sector of the American economy.

Let's look at Ingersoll's data. For the 2000-01 school year, the separation percentage for public school teachers was 15.1 percent. About 7.7 percent left the profession, and the rest simply found teaching jobs in other public schools. Ingersoll also found that the private school separation rate was 19.7 percent.

Now let's look at the data from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which has even more recent information. For the 12-month period from November 2001 through

October 2002, the average separation rate for the private sector of the U.S. economy was 42.8 percent—nearly three times higher than the teacher rate. Though BLS doesn't disaggregate its figures into specific job titles, it shows the separation rate for state and local government employees, which would include public school teachers, at exactly 15.1 percent, greatly corroborating Ingersoll's figures. Federal government employees separated at a 15.6 percent rate. The lowest private sector separation rate was in the finance, insurance, and real estate sector, at 25.2 percent. A General Accounting Office study showed that nursing, a career field professionally and demographically similar to teaching, had a 26.2 percent separation rate in 2000.

The numbers don't lie. Public school teachers are retained at a rate significantly higher than virtually any other profession in the United States—exactly contrary to the claims of the NCTAF report. **EM**

*Mike Antonucci is the director of the Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) and has covered the education beat since 1993. Many of his past articles have received national attention, including investigative stories on the California Learning Assessment System exams and the National Education Association's secret Kamber report. His report on the failed NEA-AFT merger, *Left at the Altar*, was published by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in 1998. His work has appeared in The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Investor's Business Daily, The American Enterprise, and many other periodicals.*

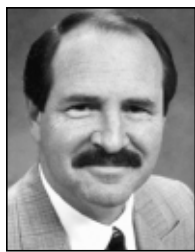
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
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NCLB Survey Results
 Coming in
 Next Month's
Education Matters!

See page 2 inside for a preview.

Is the NEA's Creation Turning on Its Creator?

A Word From Our Executive Director—Gary Beckner



Gary Beckner

Tired of being billed as a monster, the National Education Association appears to be auditioning for the role of Dr. Victor Frankenstein in a twenty-first century restaging of the classic Mary Shelley story.

You may have heard some of the NEA's recent national radio editorials, which are a part of a not-very-subtle campaign to undermine the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NEA's ultimate goal is to create enough public pressure to persuade Congress to pull funding for NCLB.

When the U.S. Department of Education was created (as a payback to the NEA for its help in getting Jimmy Carter elected), NEA leaders could not contain their pride and joy—"It's Alive! It's Alive!" Now, like the good Dr. Frankenstein, NEA leaders are wringing their hands in theatrical fear of the "monster."

In its lobbying campaign to emasculate NCLB, the NEA proclaims the new "accountability" provisions of the Act are unfair "to the children" and to teachers. NEA leaders especially dislike the provision that will close down schools that do not show the necessary improvements over the specified period of time set out in the Act. In addition, the NEA says the Act is unnecessary because significant academic improvement is already being demonstrated all across the nation. All that is needed, says NEA, is more time and money to expand the programs that are working. More time and more money have been the standard shibboleths of the NEA for decades. Unfortunately, parents and taxpayers across America are beginning to question outloud, "How much more time and how much more money is it going to take?"

By the way, has anyone noticed that the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has not overtly joined in this campaign to defund NCLB—which must cause some interesting boardroom conversations in those states where NEA and AFT have merged. Usually the two organizations are lockstep in opposition to anything proposed by "the opposite party."

However, there might be a simple explanation for the AFT's silence on this matter. The AFT was invited to participate in the negotiated rulemaking committee stage of the development of NCLB, and the NEA wasn't! The NEA even filed an official protest over not being invited to the table (for the first time since the DOE was created). Could that be why the NEA is so set against NCLB, or is it really because of concern for our children?

It just sounds so foreign to hear phrases like "too much intrusion of the federal government" in the NEA's radio campaign, yet, that is a phrase with which we can resonate. The AAE has always believed that schools can best be managed by the local communities they serve, and that the less federal intervention, the better. However, the AAE does believe some federal intervention will always be necessary. Without it, there would be an even wider educational gap in some states and between states.

As the "accountability" consequences of NCLB start to become reality, there is going to be much more controversy.

In that regard, the AAE is already receiving calls about our position on NCLB. We, as you know, never take official positions until we find out what our members think. In February we took a snapshot e-mail poll of AAE members, and the very interesting results will be the basis of our entire April issue of *Education Matters*.

In case you didn't catch it in the February edition of *Education Matters*, the AAE was also invited to participate on the rulemaking committee for NCLB. This committee was given the responsibility of clarifying the regulations for implementing this new law. I should mention that the Act was created by the U.S.

Department of Education before we were asked for our input on how to make the rules and regulations of NCLB more fairly applicable. Furthermore, our representative was one of only two teachers on that committee. That's right, two teachers on a committee of twenty-four. So, in typical D.C. fashion, the opinions of active classroom teachers were not given as much weight in the process as we felt should have been.

Having said all of the above, it's clear we're going to be in agreement with the NEA on at least one point—Teachers are

going to be unfairly blamed if NCLB doesn't work. If our early survey results are an accurate indicator, many of our members don't think NCLB will ultimately reach its worthy goal of leaving no child behind.

In contrast, parents and legislators have a much more hopeful opinion of NCLB (see article on page 5 entitled "New Report Indicates Accountability Tests are Necessary Tool in Ensuring Students Not Left Behind"). However, in spite of our members' reservations—born out of painstakingly practical experience—AAE teachers appear willing to do their best to support this latest effort to improve our nation's schools. I wouldn't have expected less and if NCLB has any chance at all of succeeding, it will be because of caring professionals—like those associated with the AAE. **EM**

EDUCATION FACTOID

Overall, the 2003 consolidated federal education funding bill provides an increase of roughly \$3.5 billion, or 7 percent, over last year's level. With this proposed increase, federal education spending has increased by 132 percent since 1996!

Increased Loan Forgiveness for Math, Science, and Special Education Teachers

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced that President Bush's fiscal year 2004 budget proposal will include funding for up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness for math, science, and special education teachers who work for five consecutive years in schools that serve high poverty students. Currently, the program provides \$5000 in loan forgiveness to qualified elementary and secondary school teachers serving low-income communities. Of the estimated 38,000 borrowers who will begin their postsecondary education this fall, 7,000 would qualify for the expanded loan forgiveness. By providing this loan forgiveness, the federal government is leading the way, demonstrating to states the need for financial incentives that are targeted rather than across-the-board. **EM**

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Having said all of the above, it's clear we're going to be in agreement with the NEA on at least one point—Teachers are going to be unfairly blamed if NCLB doesn't work.

Guest Editorial— Teacher Quality and Educational Reform

Dr. Edie Belden

“In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something else.”

—Lee Iacocca

Most Americans agree that teaching is a very important profession, and many believe that teaching benefits society more than any other profession. There is also considerable consensus that the quality of teaching bears improvement. Some have identified teaching quality as the most important domestic issue facing our nation.

It was not long ago that the quality of teaching was judged by a teacher's ability to impart knowledge to students and maintain classroom control. However, today's teachers are expected to do more and to do it with greater skill. Today's teachers are expected to know childhood development stages, learning styles, classroom management techniques, federal and state law requirements, the Quality Core Curriculum, the nuances of cultural and ethnic diversity, and reading techniques to assist the reluctant reader. Additionally, the teacher must report to parents regularly on their child's progress, post their assignments on the school's web-site, or record it on the school's answering service and adjust their teaching style to reflect the latest research and staff development emphasis. Teaching is a complex and multifaceted craft.

Teacher Quality: Centerpiece of Educational Reform

With the rapid advancement of technology in both capability and availability, the collection of huge amounts of data has become possible and new research techniques have emerged. New research techniques make it statistically possible to determine the value added by each teacher to a student's learning and to track a student's academic progress over several years. The data collected in this manner identify teacher quality as the most important variable in determining a student's success in school. A growing body of research corroborates that a knowledgeable and capable teacher in the classroom affects learning more than any other factor.

Using this and other supporting data, civic leaders, business and corporate executives, parents, and educators are targeting the improvement of teacher quality as the centerpiece of educational reform.

The Highly Qualified Teacher

No Child Left Behind requires that a highly qualified teacher be in every classroom

by 2005-2006. According to the law, a highly qualified teacher is fully certified (including alternative certification) or has passed a state-licensing exam and is licensed to teach in the state. To those concerned with educational reform, and to many educators, the definition of highly qualified is too vague and too broad to be of significant value in improving the quality of teaching.

Highly qualified teachers help students learn and do so with a repertoire of technical and professional expertise. They are teachers who possess content knowledge and learning theory, which enables them to organize their lessons into meaningful units of learning. They know why and how students learn. Highly qualified teachers have thousands of blank stares, smiles, and moments of awe and desperation filed in their memories, intuitively telling them that a student is learning or not learning. The highly qualified teacher recognizes and seizes the teachable moment, applies different methodologies for students at various developmental levels, and provides the student and parents with reliable information on progress.

New Approaches

The Carnegie Corporation's latest report, "Teaching as a Clinical Profession: A New Challenge for Education" (2002), recommends that teacher training look more like medical training and urges a two-year residency requirement. Four colleges of education—California State Northridge, Michigan State University, the University of Virginia, and Bank Street College—will each receive \$1 million per year for five years to revamp their teacher preparation programs and to track alumni performance in the classroom. The changes in the teacher education programs are intended to restructure the teaching profession into a research-based profession capable of giving every student a quality education.

The University System of Georgia's newly redesigned program of teacher preparation has new performance criteria and places greater emphasis on content knowledge and school-based preparation. Students enrolled in teacher preparation programs must take courses in both the college of education and the college of arts and sciences.

They must also complete 900 hours of field experiences in schools. Early childhood majors must complete 12-15 semester hours in reading and in mathematics; middle school majors must complete 12-15 semester hours in two areas of concentration, choosing from English, mathematics, science, and social studies; and high school majors must complete a major in the content area to be certified. The university system also guarantees its graduates. It guarantees to retrain, at no cost to the teacher or school system, any teacher teaching in-field who does not perform satisfactorily within the first two years.

Conclusions

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It is clear, however,
that teachers must take
more responsibility for
their professional
development.

Improving teacher quality will not be an easy task as both colleges of education and school administrators struggle with the need for quantity as well as quality. It is clear, however, that teachers must take more responsibility for their professional development. Teachers must direct staff development opportunities and formal educational study to areas that result in increased student achieve-

ment. All educators must share the collective responsibility for improving the quality of teaching because we do not live in a completely rational world. **EM**

Dr. Belden is the Director of Research and Professional Development at the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE). This article was printed, with permission, from Page One Magazine.

Everyone who remembers
his own educational experience
remembers

**teachers,
not methods
& techniques.**

The teacher is the kingpin
of the educational situation.
He makes or breaks programs.

—Sidney Hook



Watch Out! The Teacher Glut is on the Way

Last month's *School News Monitor* (available on the EIA website at www.eiaonline.com) provided links to two stories that appeared a day apart in *The Oregonian* and the *San Jose Mercury News*. Taken together, the stories illustrate that the teacher shortage hype is about to claim some disillusioned victims.

A recent [Portland] *Oregonian* story, headlined "Teachers are California dreaming," described a two-day teacher's job fair in Portland. Representatives of school districts from all over California were signing up recruits from Oregon's schools who are facing layoffs because of low enrollment. "To an Oregon teacher, this is the promise: capped class sizes, rising salaries, strong voter support, signing bonuses, extended pay for a longer year. It is the promise of California, a state with a glut of teaching jobs it must fill," wrote reporter Jim Tankersley. (It bears noting that Los Angeles Unified had the largest presence at the job fair and the greatest need.)

The very next day, the *San Jose Mercury News* ran a story with the headline "Newest Teachers Facing Layoffs." It revealed that many California teachers, prompted to leave other careers by tales of teacher shortages, may soon find themselves without a job. "For years, prospective educators heard a near-panicked cry from California schools: 'We're desperate for teachers.' But now, as they await the fallout from expected budget cuts, many new teachers face the prospect of being booted out of the classroom only a year or two after they arrived. Some are so worried about it that they are making contingency plans to move out of the state," wrote reporter Larry Slonaker.

The situation would be comical if it didn't involve the livelihoods of thousands of individuals in both Oregon and California (and presumably, elsewhere). The problem will grow. Last year, public school enrollment was up 1.0 percent nationally, but the number of teachers was up 1.7 percent. At current hiring rates, this gap will widen. The teacher glut is coming. **EM**

But Wait—It Appears There Will be No Teacher Glut in Arizona

A recent study published by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute concludes that the State of Arizona has no overall teacher shortage but rather shortages in specific subject fields and geographic areas. The authors go on to say that teacher attrition and a fast growing population of new students will combine to create a substantial demand for teachers in Arizona over the next eight years. In order to increase Arizona's supply of teachers to respond to this need, the authors make several policy recommendations, including streamlining certification requirements, creating incentives to move inactive teachers back into the classroom, and offering differential pay to teachers in shortage disciplines or areas. The authors also emphasize the importance of establishing a data-tracking system as a means of learning more about the sources of teachers and the reasons for teacher attrition. **EM**

Source—Teacher Quality Bulletin is a weekly e-mail newsletter published by the National Council on Teacher Quality, www.nctq.org.

Unions behind the Push to Hire More Teachers without Reducing Class Size

Over the past thirty years, per-pupil spending on education has doubled. Almost half of this increase was caused by the hiring of many more teachers. As a result, the number of students per U.S. teacher has shrunk from twenty-two to fifteen since the early 1970s. Oddly, this hasn't led to a reduction in class size; instead, the average teacher simply faces fewer classes per day. Why has the additional money been channeled into more teachers teaching fewer classes? According to the Manhattan Institute's Jay Greene and Greg Forster, the ones who benefit the most from this arrangement are the teachers unions; by jacking up the total number of teachers, they collect more dues and enlarge the ranks of "shock troops" they can call on to volunteer at election time. **EM**

Source—"Widespread Exploitation," by Jay Greene and Greg Forster, National Review Online, February 10, 2003, www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-greene-forster021003.asp.

New Math and Science Initiative Launched

Last month, DOE Secretary Rod Paige convened a Mathematics Summit and launched a math and science initiative with three interdependent goals: (1) engage the public in recognizing the need for better math and science education for every child in our nation's schools; (2) initiate a campaign to recruit, prepare, train, and retain teachers with strong backgrounds in math and science; and (3) develop an academic research base regarding what boosts student learning in math and science. The Summit included representatives from academia, business, and the federal government, kicking off with John Marburger, President Bush's science advisor, discussing "Mathematics in the 21st Century." "I must disclose at the outset that I love mathematics as many other people love music, poetry, or fine art," he said. "To me mathematics is a language rich with metaphor—and deep with insight beyond any other form of communication." Successive presenters offered practical steps to address the goals above. The five-year initiative is the product of the Education Department, the National Science Foundation, and other federal agencies involved in education and workforce development. For more information, go to www.ed.gov/inits/mathscience/. (Presentations from the summit are available at www.ed.gov/inits/mathscience/presentations.html.) **EM**

California Digs Itself Deeper in the Hole—Financially and Educationally

In California, Governor Gray Davis was forced to make budget cuts in public education as the result of the State's over \$36 billion budget shortfall, which means many schools will have to release teachers and class sizes may increase in schools across the state. Rather than firing the least effective teachers based on some measurement of student achievement, schools often hand out pink slips to teachers with the least experience because they lack the union protection afforded tenured teachers. By doing so, schools lose not only many talented teachers—teachers California public schools can not afford to lose—but also the money dedicated to developing those teachers through mentor and induction programs. A system that rewarded teachers based on student achievement, rather than years of service, could prevent at least some of these losses. **EM**

New Report Indicates Accountability Tests Are Necessary Tool in Ensuring Students Are Not Left Behind

U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner has called attention to a new report by the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute that indicates academic accountability tests such as those at the heart of the President Bush's bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act are a reliable way to ensure that students in public schools are truly learning and that education funds are being used to produce results.

"Accountability tests allow parents to know whether or not their children are truly learning," Boehner said. "They are the key to unmasking problems in a system that for too long has allowed too many children to pass through without learning the basics needed to succeed."

"Our nation simply cannot continue to spend billions of dollars a year for education without taking steps to ensure that achievement gaps are closing between disadvantaged children and their peers," Boehner said. "As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, states and schools are now receiving far more education funding from the federal government than at any other time in history, and they will be held accountable for getting results."

The Manhattan Institute report (www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_33.htm) finds that score levels on accountability ("high stakes") tests closely track score levels on other tests, suggesting that such tests provide reliable information on student performance. The report also finds that Florida, which has one of the nation's most comprehensive accountability systems, has a very strong correlation between high and low stakes test results on both score levels and year-to-year score gains. This justifies a high level of confidence that Florida's high stakes test is an accurate measure of both student performance and schools' effects on that performance, the report concludes. "The case of Florida shows that a properly designed high stakes accountability program can provide schools with an incentive to improve real learning rather than artificially improving test scores," the report notes.

The American people now clearly reject arguments that money alone is the answer to problems in America's schools and that such problems are largely a result of insufficient spending, Boehner noted. A recent national survey released by the nonpartisan Americans for Better Education (ABE) shows overwhelming popular support for reforms such as No Child Left Behind that are based on accountability tests. According to the survey:

Ninety-one percent of Americans support requiring public schools to set and meet goals each year to show that all children are learning.

Asked which they believe is more important to improve education—increasing funding, or raising standards and accountability—66 percent of Americans said raising standards and accountability, while a mere 26 percent said increasing funding.

Asked which they believe is the greater problem—children in public schools today already being forced to take too many tests, or children passing through U.S. schools without learning to read—80 percent said children passing through schools without learning to read is the greater problem. Only 15 percent indicated students being forced to take too many tests was the greater problem. **EM**

Source—Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives.

Editor's note—

The ABE survey mentioned in the above article tells us how *parents* feel about the new "accountability" standards in the No Child Left Behind Act. In next month's edition of *Education Matters*, we'll report what *teachers* think about NCLB.

NAS Releases Study Demolishing U Michigan's Diversity Claims

The National Association of Scholars released a study that provides important new findings demolishing the University of Michigan's claim in the courts of the United States that campus racial diversity has educational benefits. "This study is the final nail in the coffin for the principal claim that underlies the use of racial preferences in admissions in American higher education," said Bradford Wilson, executive director of the NAS. The study is available online at www.nas.org/rhe2.pdf.

The new study, by coauthors Thomas E. Wood, executive director of the California Association of Scholars, and Malcolm J. Sherman, associate professor of mathematics and statistics at SUNY Albany, follows their earlier report, *Race and Higher Education* (www.nas.org/rhe.pdf), which was released in May 2001.

Section V of the NAS's "Supplement to *Race and Higher Education*" focuses on Professor Sherman's on-site examinations of the HERI-CIRP database at UCLA. HERI-CIRP is the most comprehensive set of data

on higher education in the United States. Most significantly, it is the only data set robust enough to enable researchers to perform multiple regression analysis on Michigan's empirical claims. The University's legal defense of its discriminatory admissions practices rests on these claims.

Access to this vital data set has enabled Wood and Sherman to further substantiate their contention in *Race and Higher Education* that racially preferential admissions policies have harmful effects. They have also amplified their earlier demonstration that increasing the proportion of racial minorities on campus does not produce the educational benefits that the University of Michigan has claimed.

The authors also respond in the Supplement to the University's invocation of selective and controversial findings in social psychology to justify its own view of the social dynamics of preferences.

The NAS has filed briefs with the Supreme Court refuting Michigan's claims. They are available at www.nas.org. **EM**

A Quote to Note

"Let me be clear: It is not right to fight discrimination with discrimination...and that is why I absolutely support the President's position [on affirmative action], in his remarks to the nation last week and in the Administration's brief filed with the Supreme Court. I have arrived at this conclusion through a lifetime of experiences that includes teaching, coaching, managing the seventh-largest school district in America, and serving for a decade as the dean of a college of education at an historically black college.... I have directed our Office for Civil Rights to step up efforts to share information about race-neutral alternatives with the education community throughout America. As part of that effort we will soon release a report on programs nationwide to provide ideas and help. And later this year, the Department will host a national conference that will bring together leading education experts to highlight innovative ways to diversify our nation's colleges and universities."

—Secretary of Education Rod Paige

Source—Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, with any questions. Visit <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OIA/OIA/edreview/>.

Zogby Poll Reveals— Parents Disapprove of Current Sex Education Teachings

In a majority study completed recently for the Washington, D.C.-based Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health, Zogby International uncovered that parents overwhelmingly disapprove of the subject matter termed “comprehensive sex education” that is currently used in schools. Comprehensive sex education contains information on how to obtain and use contraceptives such as condoms.

Questions were asked about subject matter contained in different types of sex education programs.

Sex education curricula promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fared the worst, with three-quarters (75 percent) of parents saying they disapprove of the abstinence-plus-condoms education material, while 14 percent approved.

The next least popular area drew a 68 percent disapproval rating from participating parents, and covered miscellaneous aspects

not touched upon in other categories. Just over two in ten (22 percent) approved of the content.

Another category involved the classroom subject matter from the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, developed in 1990 by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) in conjunction with the CDC, the National School Boards Association, Planned Parenthood, and others. These guidelines are widely considered to represent the official description of comprehensive sex education. More than six in ten (61 percent) parents disapproved or strongly disapproved of the content, while one in four (25 percent) said they thought it was suitable.

The final section of questions asked parents their level of approval for abstinence-plus-character sex education using verbatim portions from the National Guidelines for Sexuality and Character Education developed in 1996 by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health. This form of sex education does not provide information to students about obtaining or using condoms, but emphasizes the importance of remaining sexually abstinent outside of marriage. Nearly three in four (73 percent) of parents *approved* of the material used in character-based abstinence education, while 16 percent disapproved.

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“The opposition increases substantially if a connection is perceived between their children and sexual activity.”

In other findings, parents by a 4-1 margin said they disapprove of teaching students in fourth through seventh grades that homosexual love relationships can be as satisfying as heterosexual relationships (71 percent disapprove, 16 percent approve).

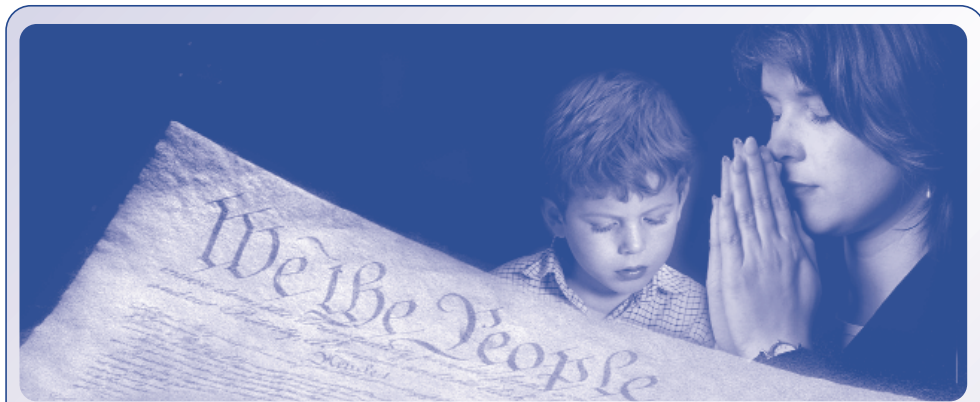
Parents appear to have a mixed opinion on teaching children factual or biological information, but the opposition increases substantially if a connection is perceived between *their* children and sexual activity.

In a related reaction, nearly half (46 percent) of parents surveyed disapprove of the concept of allowing teens to obtain contraception without parental approval. But when the question is personalized to *their* child, about 70 percent of parents disapprove of *their* child being able to obtain contraception without their knowledge or approval.

Based on current curricula standards for sex education, different questions were asked of parents of students in kindergarten through third grade (generally, ages 5-8); children in fourth through seventh grades (ages 9-12); middle school students (ages 12-15); and high school adolescents (ages 15-18).

Zogby International conducted the interviews of 1,245 parents of children in grades K-12, chosen at random nationwide, from its headquarters in Utica, NY, January 11-12, 2003. The margin of error is +/- 2.8 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.

For detailed analysis of the Zogby study entitled “What Parents Really Think,” visit www.zogby.com. **EM**



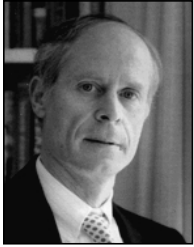
Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Schools— New USDOE Guidelines

On February 7, 2003, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) released a guidance document covering Section 9524 of NCLB, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools. It requires that each local or intermediate school district or public school academy, as a condition of receiving funds under any portion of the NCLB, annually certify, in writing to the state agency, that it has no policy that prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public schools. Complete details are provided at http://www.ed.gov/inits/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html

The effective date for this provision was October 1, 2002. Since the guidance was only recently completed, USDOE gave districts an extension to March 15, 2003, to submit this certification to their State Department of Education. The state is then required by April 15, 2003, to provide the USDOE a list of all districts not providing this certification. A district's failure to submit the required certification may result in the district's loss of funding under NCLB. Grant programs covered by Section 9524 include Title I, Reading First, Charter Schools, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and many others. **EM**

Why is U.S. History Still a Mystery to Our Children?

By Peter Gibbon



Peter Gibbon

Why is American history still a mystery to our students? Why are the test scores so low? There are a number of reasons:

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress

history test is different from the test given fifteen years ago. It is more sophisticated and requires analytical skills and writing abilities, as well as the recall of facts. The test covers more ground than the conventional American history course covers. There is more to learn and more to test. The test is given to students who take electives in social studies courses and may not be exposed to a conventional American history course. The notion of precise, sophisticated standards linked to curriculum and high-stakes testing is still new to Americans, who are accustomed to vague goals and teacher independence. Some teachers still short-change basic chronology and facts, and instead stress concepts, current events, and inquiry-based discussion. Concentrating on critical inquiry and coverage may squeeze out biographies and memoirs, materials that add excitement and drama to the American story and increase student interest.

The education of American teachers is uneven. Nationwide, more than half of social studies teachers have not majored in history. Collaborative lesson planning and professional development are not routine, as they are, for example, in Japan. Total student loads are high; planning periods, rare; mentoring, haphazard; pay, low; second jobs, common. The most precise standards, the most sophisticated curriculum, the most rigorous test, cannot make up for poorly prepared, demoralized teachers. The test is given to students raised in a visual culture, students who have shrinking vocabularies, shorter attention spans, and less efficient reading skills. Students spend more time with media than with teachers. Students who are exposed to an entertainment-celebrity culture find history boring and suspect. Data indicate that contemporary students are more vocational-minded and less civic-minded, and therefore less interested in the liberal arts.



What are our children learning about America's past? I travel around the country talking to high school students about the great men and women who have shaped America. What I have found is that revisionist history permeates our schools and culture. This suspicious view of American history is damaging to young people because it makes them ashamed of their

past and pessimistic about the future. It implies that we are superior to our ancestors and encourages attitudes of ingratitude and self-righteousness. It makes young people dismissive of greatness by repudiating the notion that one person can make a difference, and, finally, attributing all progress to social and economic forces, revisionist history fosters historic fatalism.

Our children should master chronology and basic facts about America's past. They should learn how to analyze evidence and develop the habits of critical inquiry. They should also

learn about the accomplishments of America, its ingenuity, its incomparable abundance, its steady progress toward equality, its humanitarianism. We should encourage students to be grateful to our ancestors, respectful of our values and institutions, proud of our heroes and, if I dare use the word, a little patriotic.

In the presentation of American history, there has always been a duel between professional historians who want to present what they consider to be the truth about the American past and lay people who believe that history should promote civic virtue. Recently, the duel has become more intense because the presentation of American history has become darker. Defenders of this new realism say that it prevents children from being naïve. The dark side presented to young people is the projection on the American past of a tabloid culture preoccupied with sex, comfortable with cynicism,

hostile to greatness. This fixation on the dark side is also a by-product of the enterprise of history because primary sources that survive tend to concentrate on violence, conflict, and the sensational, rather than on the normal and the good.

To counteract radical revisionist history, a moderate triumphalism would admit the mistakes America has made but insist that America learns from its mistakes. A moderate triumphalism would look into all corners of American history for heroes but would not automatically denigrate heroes of the past because they were privileged or powerful, because they thought or explored, or because they did not surmount every prejudice of their time. The trick is to teach American history so that students become informed *and* optimistic, realistic *and* idealistic, analytical *and* patriotic. **EM**

Dr. Peter Gibbon is a Research Associate in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has published articles in Newsweek, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Baltimore Sun, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Washington Post as well as in a variety of professional journals. He has appeared on numerous television and radio programs, including Fox News, Here and Now, and On Point. His book, A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness, was published by Atlantic Monthly Press in July 2002. Dr. Gibbon was a teacher and administrator for thirty years, and is the former headmaster of Hackley School in Tarrytown, New York.

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National History Club Growing

The National History Club, founded in 2002, now has more than 550 members in high school history club chapters in fourteen states. The club's first newsletter is now online at www.tcr.org. The expressed goal of the newly formed organization is the promotion of the reading, writing, discussion, and pleasures of history among high school teachers and students of history. If your high school would like to apply for a charter, please send the names and addresses of at least ten members and a faculty advisor to: Robert Nasson, Executive Director, National History Club, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, MA 01776, email: nasson@tcr.org. **EM**

Gotcha!—New Product Helps Parents and Teachers Catch Plagiarizers

Maryland-based 4 Point Group, LLC, announces the launch of their source-detection software, Gotcha©. The application will enable educators to check student papers electronically for content, accuracy, and originality.

Using the latest technology employed by many Fortune 500 companies and NASA in their communication programs, Gotcha© checks papers submitted electronically by students in minutes for apparent duplication. References are checked for accuracy, and document content is analyzed for plagiarism from existing work found on the Internet. Gotcha© supplies teachers with references to possible violations, as well as web-site

addresses in which the violations can be found. The application also checks the document against other electronically submitted papers.

When teachers at the local high school voiced suspicions of widespread plagiarism, Gotcha© Software Engineer Bill Girten's wife, Shari, recognized the need for a source-detection application. At the time, teachers were unable to check their student's papers without using hours of personal time to research possible violations. She challenged Bill to come up with a software solution to the problem, and the project was born. Gotcha© aims to give hours back to the teachers, and force compliance and honesty from students. **EM**

Rethinking Vocational Education

President Bush's 2004 budget presents many worthy education policy reforms, although in most cases the fine print remains to be written. Here's one that has drawn less attention but could prove equally momentous, if not controversial. In the portion of the budget dealing with the Education Department's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, you will find a preview of "The Secondary and Technical Education Excellence Act of 2003," which is the administration's plan to overhaul the "Perkins Act," Washington's main vocational-education law, last revised in 1998. Uncle Sam's involvement with voc ed goes back to 1917, however, and the existing program is creaky as well as old. It still assumes that high schools should prepare some students directly for the workforce, via a job-centered and not-very-academic curriculum, while the rest get an academic education and head toward college. Perhaps that kind of curricular tracking made sense two or three decades back, but not today. The fact is that nearly all of today's young people need a proper secondary education to equip them for a life that will include multiple jobs requiring ever more sophisticated skills, as well as one or more bouts with postsecondary education (maybe right after high school, perhaps later) and successful citizenship in a complex modern society. To the dismay of traditional vocational educators, the Bush administration's "Sec-Tech" proposal, quietly crafted by assistant secretary Carol D'Amico, picks up where NCLB leaves off. It says that U.S. high schools need to equip ALL their students with core academic competencies and that job-related training should take place **after** high school, when it should be supplied mainly by community and technical colleges. Expect fireworks on Capitol Hill from unreconstructed defenders of old-fashioned voc ed, but Dr. D'Amico and her colleagues have bravely ventured into the future. For more information, visit www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/CTE/actespeech.doc.

EM

Source—Education Gadfly, a weekly bulletin of news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. For more information, visit www.edexcellence.net.



ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Non Campus Mentis

Professor Anders Henrikson has collected the following "pearls" during his tenure and swears that they are taken verbatim from student papers, written at colleges and universities throughout the United States. He has included these and hundreds of others in his book *Non Campus Mentis*. The book's title is a play on the Latin phrase, *non compos mentis*, which means "not of sound mind."

Art Linkletter's "kids" did say the darndest things, but these are from "college kids," for heaven's sake:

- "History, as we know, is always bias, because human beings have to be studied by other human beings, not by independent observers of another species."
- "The Assyrian program of exterminating various ethnic groups generally failed to promote cultural diversity."
- "The history of the Jewish people begins with Abraham, Issac, and their twelve children. Old Testament profits include, Moses...and Confucius."
- "The hiring of professional armies made aggression more controlled and intimate. The Prussian army, for example, would surprise young men by grabbing them in unfair places and sending them to Shanghai."
- "Another reason that the governments of European nations tried to take over other lands was so that they could gain so-called 'cleavage.'"
- "China had so many Chinese that people are allowed to reproduce no more than one half of themselves."
- "George Washington was the first and only president to be elected anonymously by the Electoral College."
- "Americans, of course, wanted no involvement in the French and Indian War because they did not want to fight in India."
- "Actually, the fall of empires has been a good thing, because it gives more people a chance to exploit their own people without outside interference."
- "Workers voted for conservatives because they believed in unemployment. Inspired by these ideas, reformers tried to ban sweating from the shops."



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